



2013-078

Sanders Marble, ed., *Scraping the Barrel: The Military Use of Substandard Manpower, 1860–1960*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. vi, 354. ISBN 978-0-8232-3978-8.

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Studies of modern warfare seldom delve into the question of the actual quality of a nation's manpower, as opposed to generalizations about fighting abilities and limitations of specific organizations. To shed light on the use of personnel below what are considered acceptable standards, Sanders Marble (US Army Medical Command) has collected eleven thoughtful and well-conceived essays on the methods of marshalling manpower effectively to meet wartime needs in the period 1860–1960. Contributors to *Scraping the Barrel* include such distinguished professionals as Dennis Showalter, David Glantz, and Walter Dunn. All of the essays present high-quality analyses, though they adopt varying definitions of “substandard” in its conceptual and practical denotations. They show that, over the past two centuries, the scope of modern industrialized warfare—and concomitant casualty rates—have increased dramatically and nations struggling to man their military formations at required levels have resorted to accepting and deploying men ill-suited to military service.

Certain central ideas pervade the essays. Most prominently, that multifaceted social constructs determine what actually makes a person militarily “substandard.” As Marble writes, “The people who make up armies are products of their societies, largely sharing their society's ideas about disabilities, but armies also have a separate and unique requirement” (1). In every case addressed in this collection, social ideas and norms figured prominently in establishing just what individuals were fit for service, how they should be apportioned to a military force, and how they might best be used. The essays stress that standards shift with the fortunes of war and the precise needs of the military. Hence, no two cases examined here are the same, and each involved particular debates and dilemmas.

Paul Cimballa in chapter 1, “Federal Manpower Needs and the U.S. Army's Veteran Reserve Corps,” Peter Simkins in chapter 4, “‘Each One a Pocket Hercules’: The Bantam Experiment and the Case of the Thirty-Fifth Division,” and Sanders Marble in chapter 6, “Below the Bar: The U.S. Army and Limited Service Manpower,” examine the issue of physical frailty in the drive for additional manpower. Dennis Showalter in chapter 2, “A Grand Illusion? German Reserves, 1815–1914,” and André José Lambelet in chapter 3, “Manifestly Inferior? French Reserves, 1871–1914,” evaluate the initiatives of the German states and France to maximize national military strength through reserve systems and/or territorial guards made up of older individuals in the decades before the First World War. Steven Short in chapter 5, “Scraping the Barrel: African American Troops and World War I,” and Valdis Lumans in chapters 9, “Recruiting *Volksdeutsche* for the Waffen-SS: From Skimming the Cream to Scraping the Dregs,” and 10, “The Ethnic Germans of the Waffen-SS in Combat: Dregs or Gems?” investigate ethnic considerations that shaped the recruiting and use of manpower in the American and German armies of the First and Second World Wars, respectively. David Glantz in chapter 7, “Soviet Use of ‘Substandard’ Manpower in the Red Army, 1941–1945,” and Walter Dunn in chapter 8, “German Bodenständig Divisions,” assess the use of second-tier manpower in the Soviet and German armies during World War II. Thomas Sticht in chapter 11, “Project 100,000 in the Vietnam War and Afterward,” examines the use of mentally disadvantaged men in the US military.

Given the unique nature of these particular situations, no comprehensive thesis emerges; in short, there is no one “right” way to use substandard manpower. Even Marble's conclusion that “if there is a lesson on how to use substandard manpower, it seems to be to form special units, assign them tasks within their capabilities, and trust them” (271–72) does not apply without exception. For example, Lambelet writes that “while reserve *units* were hamstrung by their relegation to second-class status because of doubts about the motives of reservists, *individual* reservists and territorials performed better in the aggregate than the high

command expected” (78). And Peter Simkins asserts that “there was little essentially wrong with the fighting spirit of *individual* Bantams, even if the overall Bantam concept, in a *collective* sense, was flawed and unsustainable” (104).

In summarizing the arguments of the various contributors, Marble manages—cautiously—to find some consensus: “Given the span of a century between the first and last examples, the limited number of examples, and the various cultural factors at play, it would be rash to draw definitive conclusions. Yet it is fair to say that substandard men can play a useful and at times important role in an army” (271–72).

The essays are restricted to American or great-power European cases and to conventional, standing militaries, rather than alternative forms of warfare or social and/or political movements that involved military actions. This is unfortunate, since some consideration of, say, the mid-nineteenth-century revolutions or the origins of the Bolshevik movement would have been valuable. Marble is, of course, aware of this and usefully identifies specific areas in need of further dialogue and research in each of the book’s case studies. In the meantime, *Scraping the Barrel* stands as an excellent and most welcome resource for a neglected topic, one that opens the door to further investigations of the complexities of personnel management during wartime.